

“God of All Comfort”

2 Corinthians 1:3-11

Teen Challenge Sunday - February 23, 2020

[2 Corinthians 1:3-5, 8-11]

One of the most dominant themes in life is affliction. Life is sprinkled and sometimes even permeated by trials, hardship, and suffering.

- Some affliction is the result of our own choices.
- Some affliction results from matters beyond our control.

For example, we may have financial problems as a result of our lifestyle choices, or we may have financial problems that resulted from circumstances beyond our control. We may have health problems that result from choices that we have made, or we may get hit with a health crisis out of the blue. We may have relational affliction because we have been living selfishly out of our sin nature, or we may be afflicted by someone else’s choice to live selfishly toward us—or both!

But regardless of the source of our affliction, when we turn to God in surrender, hope, and trust in the midst of those circumstances, He begins to work out good purposes through them. ***In the hands of God, no suffering is wasted.*** *When we entrust our affliction to God with humble dependence and genuine hope, He transforms our difficult circumstances into a divine tool of grace in His hand.* So what is God up to in those seasons of affliction? 2 Corinthians 1 gives us some insight into how God uses affliction to accomplish gracious purposes.

1. ***God uses affliction as a tool of grace by helping us rightfully despair of self*** [vs. 8-9]. God uses affliction to graciously bring us to the end of ourselves. None of us want to be at the end of our rope, but until we get there, we will not know the all sufficient power of God’s grace. And of course, God brings us to the end of ourselves as a means to a greater end...
2. ***God uses affliction as a tool of grace by helping us trust in God supremely*** [vs. 9]. If you come to the end of yourself but don’t turn to trust in God, all you have is utter despair. But if in your despair, you turn to trust in God Almighty, you gain life and hope and purpose. This is why coming to the end of yourself is the best thing that can ever happen to you. You were never meant to trust in yourself. You were created to find your hope and satisfaction and sufficiency in God.

This is at the very heart of the gospel. The way a person is saved from their sin is when they come to the realization that they are spiritually bankrupt.

There is nothing we can do, nothing we can offer to God, to cover the guilt of our sin. And in that state of spiritual poverty and empty-handed desperation, we turn and take hold of Christ alone, seeing that His death alone is sufficient to cover the debt of our sin. Jesus said, *“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven”* (Mt 5:3). Oh the joy, of the one who recognizes he is spiritually destitute, and turning to trust wholly in Christ and none in himself, inherits all the wealth of God’s saving grace and favor and care!

So God will use affliction as a tool of grace to strengthen our hope in God, even when the affliction is so severe that it seems there is no way out and the only hope left is that God raises the dead!

3. ***God uses affliction as a tool of grace to equip us to comfort others in suffering*** [vs. 3-5]. Comfort is the result of hoping in God’s sovereign care for us. As we experience the sufficiency of His grace in our suffering, it equips us to then comfort others who suffer by pointing them to the Lord so they too can experience the consolation of God’s supremacy. Those who have experienced grace in suffering have grace to share with those who suffer.
4. ***God uses affliction as a tool of grace through the means of our prayers for one another*** [vs. 10-11]. God has ordained that one of the means through which He delivers us is the prayers of the saints. God never intended for us to stand alone. One man’s affliction is a call for the whole church to pray.
5. ***God uses affliction as a tool of grace to restore God’s proper place in our lives—for our joy*** (vs. 3, 11). When affliction brings us to the end of ourselves so that we truly trust in God, He is restored to His proper place in our lives as the object of our hope. This is where Paul begins and ends. He begins by blessing the God of Father of our Lord Jesus Christ (vs.3)— putting God in His proper place of worship. And he concludes in vs. 11, that the result of the affliction will be thanksgiving from all those who have prayed for God’s deliverance. *Gratitude is an expression of joy.* And it comes from a worshiping heart of hope that has made God supreme in all things.

If you are faced with affliction today, it is an opportunity for God to work grace into your life as you abandon self-reliance to hope in God.